New York State College of Agriculture CORNELL EXTENSION BULLETIN 1047

Corsages

FROM GARDEN FLOWERS

by R.T. Fox

Because corsages are tiny bouquets without water, flowers for a corsage must be durable. A corsage is usually worn for a minimum of three hours. The flowers must remain in good condition for at least this length of time.

The following flowers are suitable for corsages, and one or more is in bloom from early spring to late fall: snowdrop, heather, glory-of-the-snow, Siberian squill, grape hyacinth, lily-of-the-valley, primula, narcissus, doronicum, tulip, bulbous iris, drawf iris, English Daisy, violet, trollius, painted daisy, peony, day lily, pansy, German and Siberian iris, carnation pink, rose, delphinium, aster, lily, marigold, zinnia, gladiolus, geranium, sweet pea, scabiosa, gaillardia, shasta daisy, chrysanthemum and Christmas rose.

With the proper conditioning beforehand, all of these flowers will last for at least the minimum time without wilting. Many of them are available in a range of colors making an even wider selection possible.

Petunias, nicotinana, cosmos and forget-me-nots are poor corsage flowers. Although they may be used in cut flower arrangements, they wilt quickly when they are out of water.

SELECTION OF FOLIAGE

The foliage on most flowers is not suitable for corsage use; either it is not the right shape, or it wilts too quickly. Broadleaved evergreen foliages are most suitable. The leathery or waxy surface makes the leaves last well, and the strong green color and broad surface provide a good color contrast to the flowers.

Good foliages available throughout the year are rhododendron, pachysandra, mountain laurel, andromeda, leucothoe, English ivy, Henry honeysuckle and euonymus.

From midsummer to fall, flowering quince, peony, forsythia, oak and the leathery-leaved roses such as the Peace rose provide good foliage.

CONDITIONING FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

Flowers and foliage should be conditioned after they are picked. This process is sometimes called hardening. When flowers are cut from the garden they do not have all of the water that can be absorbed into their tissues. They are in a soft or semi-wilted state. Therefore, after flowers and foliages are picked, put them in water for three or four hours, or overnight, to allow time for water intake.

The flower stems, which will be discarded, can be cut short before they are placed in water and any extra foliage can be removed from the flower stalks. To cut down on water loss, the jar of flowers should be covered with paper and set in a cool, draught-free place until you are ready to make the corsage.

OTHER CORSAGE MATERIALS

Wire. Wire is necessary for making a good corsage. Flower stems usually wilt quickly and allow the flower to droop. Removing the stem also eliminates undesirable bulk and weight. Wire, substituted for the stem, can control the placement of the flowers for the best design effect.

Tape. The wired stems of the corsage must be covered with tape. A waxed crepe paper floraltape is used by commercial florists. This material is available in corsage kits. A thin plastic millinery tape also can be used.

Ribbon. Bows may or may not be used on a corsage. Some corsages need the extra color and substance of a bow. Choose ribbon in a color that blends with or matches the flowers. If a good match is not available, use white or dull green. Always remember that the bow is an accessory—you want to show the flowers.

Corsage Pins. A long pin is needed to fasten a corsage in place. Common pins are not large enough. If you do not have corsage pins saved from florist corsages, buy hat pins in a variety store. One pin usually will hold a corsage in place, but large corsages may require two.

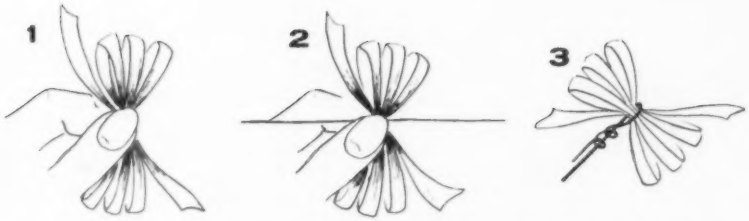
Bags. Corsages will last better if they are sprayed lightly with water and stored in bags in a refrigerator until they are used. This prevents the loss of water vapor which induces wilting. Regular freezer bags of plastic or cellophane are excellent for corsages.

WIRING PROCEDURES

There are six general methods of wiring flowers and two methods of wiring foliage.

Pierce Method.

Flowers with a swelling just under the flower head may be wired by the pierce method. Roses and carnations are good examples of flowers requiring this



To make a bow, (1) gather loops between thumb and finger, (2) place wire over center of bow, (3) then bend wire around to back and twist tightly.

MAKING A BOW

A length of ribbon about three-fourths inch wide and one yard long is needed for a bow.

1. Loop the ribbon back and forth between the thumb and forefinger. Gather and pinch the loops together at the center as they are formed. Make three or four loops on each side.
2. Place a 12-inch piece of medium, 26-gauge wire over the center where the loops are held by the fingers.
3. Wrap the wire once around the center of the bow (additional turns around the bow flatten out the loops).
4. Twist the wires together two or three times. Leave the ends of the wire for fastening the bow to the corsage.

Left: A nosegay of a single carnation encircled by rosebuds; trimmed salal leaves form the background.
Center: A spray corsage of pompom chrysanthemums with leucothe leaves.
Right: An individual flower corsage with a single open gladiolus flower and three buds added.

method. Use a heavy wire, 22 or 24 gauge, about 12-inches long.

Pierce through the swollen section directly under the flower.

String the flower midway along the wire.

Bend the two ends of the wire down along the stem.

Cut off all but about one-half inch of the stem.

Twist one end of the wire twice around the stub of the stem and the other end of the wire. Draw the remaining wire down parallel to the first wire to form a wire stem.

Criss-Cross Method

Flowers that snap off from their stems, or florets with no stems may be wired by the criss-cross method. Gladioli florets, iris and day lilies are good examples. Use two fine wires, 28 or 30 gauge, about 12-inches long. Insert the wires at right angles to each other at the base of the flower petals. All four wire ends are bent down, similar to the pierce method, to form a stem.

Hook Method

Single asters, doronicums, painted daisy, single chrysanthemums and gaillardias that have a hard, disc-like center may be wired by the hook method. Use a medium 26-gauge wire, about eight-inches long.

From the underside, push the wire through the disc-like center of the flower.

Bend the emerging end of the wire into a small hook.

Pull the wire hook gently back into the center disc to make the hook invisible.

Cut off all but one or two inches of the stem.

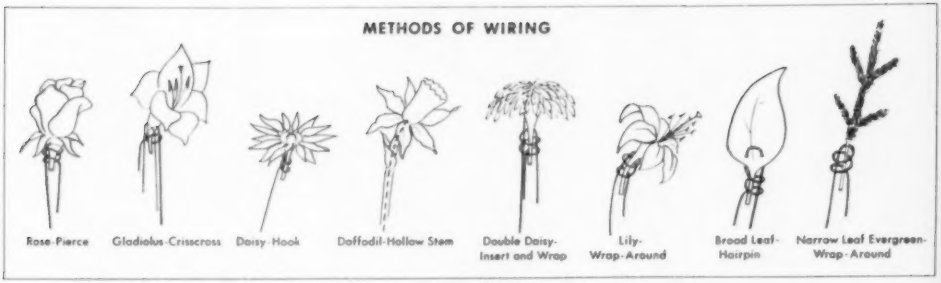
Twist the wire twice around the stub of the stem and draw the remaining wire down to form a wire stem.

Hollow Stem Method

Any flower that has a hollow stem may be wired by inserting a wire up the stem. Bachelor buttons and daffodils are good examples of hollow stem flowers. Use a 24-gauge or 26-gauge wire about eight-inches long. Leave the flower stems about six inches long. Push the wire up the flower stem until it is firmly seated in the base of the flower. Cut off any wire protruding from the base of the stem.

Insert and wrap method

Any large double daisy or multipetaled flower may be wired with the two wire insert and wrap method. Zinnias, asters, chrysanthemums, double shasta daisies, peonies, and football mums may be wired in this manner. Insert a medium, 24-gauge, to heavy, 22 gauge, wire in the base of the flower, parallel to the stem. Cut off all but about one and one half inches of the stem. Wrap a second wire, 24-gauge or 26-gauge, about 12-inches long, around the stem and insert-wire, and bend it parallel to the insert-wire to form a wire stem.



Wrap-around method

Any flower that cannot be wired by one of the other methods is wired by the wrap-around method. Lilies, sweet peas, violets, lily-of-the-valley, delphinium and geranium florets are all wired in this manner. The smaller flowers are usually wired in groups of two or three. Wire size depends on the flower used. Use a fine wire for violets, delphinium, and geranium florets and a heavy wire for large lilies.

Wrap a 12-inch length of wire around the stem close under the flower. Cut the stem short and bend the two wire ends parallel to the stem to form a wire stem.

For small stalks of flowers such as lily-of-the-valley or sweet peas, the wire is usually spiraled up among the flowers to gain more control.

Hairpin method

All broadleaved foliage is wired by the hairpin method. Use a medium 26-gauge wire, about 12-inches long. Bend the wire in the shape of a hairpin. Pierce the leaf on either side of the midvein about one-half inch from the base of the leaf. Draw up the "U" of the wire snugly and bend the two ends of the wire parallel to the leaf stem. Cut the stem to one-fourth inch in length. Wrap one end of the wire around the stub end of the leaf stem and the other end of wire. The wire extends to form a wire stem.

Wrap-around method

Needle-type foliage, such as sprigs of evergreen for Christmas corsages, is wired by the wrap-around method. Wrap a medium gauge wire around the base of the stem and bend it to form a wire stem.

TAPING PROCEDURES

Tape is applied on the wired stems in much the same manner that a bandage is spiraled around an arm. Starting under the flower, wrap the tape in a neat, smooth spiral. Stretch the tape taut as it is applied.

Foliage stems are taped in the same manner. The neatly covered wire acts as the leaf stem.

CORSAGE ASSEMBLY

Corsages may be grouped into three main types, nosegay, spray, or individual flower.

Nosegay

Group the flowers together in a circular form starting with one in the center and adding circles of flowers until the desired size is achieved, as in a colonial nosegay. Violets and sweet peas may be grouped in a solid ball-like mass. Add foliage in a ring around the outside and hold the corsage together with tape bound around the stems just under the flowers.

If the wire stems are individually taped, they may be left as a natural grouping of stems. To save time and tape on a nosegay corsage, tape wires only halfway down the stems, then tape the whole cluster of wires as a single large stem.

Add a bow for extra color, or wear the corsage without a bow for a more tailored effect. Always fasten the bow close under the flowers to give the effect of tying the flowers together.

Spray corsage

Wire and tape all flowers and arrange them in a casual group that allows the individual flower forms to show. The outline may be triangular, oval or crescent shaped with the smaller buds at the top and the larger, open flowers at the bottom. Wrap a length of tape around the stems under the flowers to hold them in place.

Add the wired and taped foliage at the back and sides of the corsage for color and contrast. Do not allow foliage to dominate the corsage. Large leaves can be trimmed to a smaller size with scissors. A natural leaf outline should be followed. After the foliage is placed, wrap another length of tape around the stems to hold the foliage in position.

Fasten a bow close under the flowers by twisting the wires around the stems. Cut off any excess wire and bend the short, sharp end back. Trim the stem ends to a pleasing length.

Individual flower

Use a single large flower such as a peony, chrysanthemum, lily, gladiolus, large rose or tuberous begonia for an individual flower corsage. One or two buds also may be added for contrast. Place three or four wired leaves behind the flower to set off its beauty. All of the stems may be taped as a single stem, or the individual flower and leaf stems may be taped separately.

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